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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 001704

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [BU](#) [IZ](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIAN TROOPS LIKELY TO REMAIN IN IRAQ THROUGH  
DECEMBER ELECTIONS

REF: A) STATE 164149 B) SOFIA 1639

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Jeffrey Levine  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Stanishev told Ambassador October 5 that Bulgaria will likely maintain its contingent in Iraq through the December 15 elections. The decision regarding a follow-on military activity is still under discussion and will next be considered in the coalition government,s political council. The desire to continue as a reliable partner in the Global War on Terror as well as to contribute to Iraq,s stability remains a high priority for Bulgaria. The Prime Minister is also looking towards President Purvanov,s White House visit to further strengthen the bilateral relationship. Finally, Stanishev requested U.S. support for Bulgaria,s 2007 EU accession. End Summary

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Follow-on Mission  
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12. (C) The Ambassador requested the meeting to reinforce our recommendation that Bulgaria undertake the MEK Mission (reftel A) when it withdraws its current contingent from Diwaniyah Province (The PM's foreign policy advisor had signalled to us the need for the meeting to counter some misunderstanding of the U.S. position since the visit of the U.S. contact team (reftel B)). Leaders of the three political parties that comprise the current coalition government are scheduled to meet on this issue shortly, and have yet to agree on the form Bulgaria,s future commitment will take. According to Stanishev, the various proposals presented by the U.S. team are under consideration, but the Bulgarian military has also been asked to present additional options. Strategically, Stanishev agreed that the preservation of stability in Iraq is the only alternative to chaos and an increased terrorist threat. Politically, however, the Bulgarians are still searching for a formula that will allow continued participation without creating serious problems for the six-week-old government.

13. (C) Stanishev said Bulgaria is likely to be able to accommodate our request to keep their current soldiers on the ground through the December formation of the new Iraqi government. He ruled out a proposal from the Bulgarian military to send a replacement contingent for the one scheduled to depart later this month. Instead, they plan to rotate in additional soldiers to replace only the current volunteers who are not willing to extend beyond their October-November commitment. Although some "symbolic" withdrawals may begin earlier, Stanishev said the actual departure of their troops - if only for Kuwait - will begin between December 20 and December 31.

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Purvanov visit  
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14. (C) Stanishev also said the government is paying high attention to President Purvanov,s visit and would like it to be as substantive as possible. The ministers of Defense, Economy, and Foreign Affairs will accompany Purvanov, Stanishev said, to underscore the serious working nature of the visit. Foreign Minister Kalfin, according to Stanishev, will be raising with Secretary Rice a proposal to establish a cyber-security center in Sofia. In a separate discussion Oct. 3, President Purvanov invited the Ambassador to meet with him and the Presidential staff Oct. 10 to review substantive preparations for the Oct.17-19 U.S. visit.  
BEYRL